

**Chancellor's Community Forum**  
**5 Year Plan**  
**October 29, 2008**  
**Francis-Stevens EC**  
**6:30 pm – 8:00 pm**  
**Richard Nyankori**

*The notes below reflect our effort to summarize the comments, questions and concerns expressed at each meeting. They are not recorded verbatim and should not be considered direct quotations.*

**Overview:** Positive interactions to the plan overall. Most of the participants were school staff and community members, no parents were present in our group. Some of their suggestions included: a more comprehensive communication strategy for involving the parents/school staff and outside community with the forums and Plans, including the key metrics and goal sheet from the Initiative Plan with the information presented in the forums; and frequent communication/stronger visibility of central office within the schools.

**Keywords:** 5 Year Plan, Master Education Plan, Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) programs, truancy, out of school time providers, Career & Technical Education (CTE), Twilight program, full service model

**Presenter/ Moderator:** Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management  
Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

**Panelist:** Richard Nyankori, Deputy Chancellor for Special Education  
Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

**Codes**

MR = Michelle Rhee, Chancellor

AS = Abigail Smith, Chief of Transformation Management

RJN = Richard Nyankori, Deputy Chancellor for Special Education

CM = Community Member

**Notes:**

**RJN:** Welcomes everyone. The purpose of tonight is to get feedback on the **5 Year Plan**. We took the **Master Education Plan (MEP)** to put it into operation, and then developed an action plan to exercise our major priorities.

*Let's talk about your initial thoughts; what are they?*

**CM:** I have been involved with many community meetings for the last 5 administrations, and these 6 areas summarize what other administrations have been at the top of the list for many years. You hit the major action items and I like that you kept the major priorities.

**RJN:** The Chancellor always talks about the wide scope and need, but we are trying to focus on what is important now. How it lives at the school level is where we need to work harder. It will take teachers and the community to do this.

**CM:** *Can you talk about how this trickles down and infuses into local sites? Is it all coming down from the top?*

**CM:** My experience has been that **truancy** is a major problem and impedes academics. Parent outreach is important, but we don't have phone numbers to contact families. Last year had a parent resource room that no one took advantage of. Community outreach is a great priority.

**RJN:** *How do you perceive that plans have been communicated to you?*

**CM:** I found out about the plan on web site. We were not informed directly about this. I don't know any teacher who knows about the plan and is not relevant to our every day duties. Teachers are not concerned about it. There are many lofty goals that are well intentioned. Initially I am disappointed, because at our school, there is really shortage of personnel and our students are not getting the sociological support they needs. Not directly addressing lack of resources at our schools (ie we are out of paper). Basic resources are not being met and don't see it in the plan.

**CM:** These are rhetoric and talking points you hear in every district. But since we are dealing with pragmatic issues, *how can I make a compelling classroom environment?*

**CM:** There are lots of challenges in meeting the needs of the parents. *Can you speak to school based parent entities and how that piece fits in to the plan? How do you reach them so that they know they are being heard?*

**RJN:** There are different levels of interactions based on communities. Parents struggle with same basic needs that students struggle with so when you talk about parent involvement, it varies. You believe and trust in your schools, you are not an active force into curriculum, because you see outcomes. Then there is not so good parent involvement so the needs of kids are sacrificed for adult contests. Parent resource centers are for face value. In 5 years we want parents to question our teaching and achievement. Our kids in pre-k and k are even to other districts in the area, in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade there is a dip, in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade there is a recession in skills, value negative. We think this is because of lack of resources and quality of teaching. No one wanted their school to close down even though there were no resources and has not produced children at or above grade level. But we want parents to question why this is happening. We thought about providing parents with business cards – what grade level is my child on today, how are you going to get them on grade level, who else can get them there? I have worked in urban and suburban schools but they spent less per pupil by 20% than we do. The bureaucracy behind the procurement process is arduous and at the same time the hierarchy of needs must be met. But you also must move forward. If you

looked at 50% our schools teachers would still say the same thing about a lack of resources.

**CM:** The kind of support is missing is the **out of school time providers**. Recognizing that this is a great source of energy and enthusiasm and forming partnerships with outside community is important. In the plan there isn't any goals and implications of NCLB and how restructuring plays out with parent/teacher/community involvement. **Career and technical education (CTE)** needs to be focused on. 9% of DCPS graduates obtain a college degree, so we need to have programs that are structured for the 91% who don't graduate. DC doesn't have a community college and students have to spend time in University of the District of Columbia with building skills they were supposed to have in high school.

**RJN:** Many of our kids who have gone on to college are in the remedial track, even coming out of our best schools. When we talk about preparing kids for college we are using a 5 year college track as a measure for how we prepare them.

**CM:** You mentioned the plateau between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade which I see in my work. I found it difficult to find things on the web site. You should have schools reach out to the community to address how to find information on the web site.

**CM:** *Where are the other forums held?*

**RJN:** They are held in other wards to involve various community members.

**CM:** Not all parents have the skills to express their concerns in acceptable ways, but also creating the capacity with educators to inform parents of what they should be asking and be receptive to what parents have to say. This plan should have been presented to each of the schools and *how does each school contribute to this plan?*

**CM:** *How is the curriculum developed and who ensures it is rigorous?*

**RJN:** Having been a curriculum developer, DCPS had it wrong. A well developed curriculum that is aligned has plenty of options for teachers and then the curriculums have interventions in place for students who need more support. For intensive needs we need other options. Another way we want to make curriculum relevant is dependent but for kids it is something that stimulates an interest and is making a connection with a kid. This is what teachers are for – at some level teachers inspire and ignite learning. We could do a better job to work with teachers and make the curriculum relevant based on each classroom. Exploration that young kids have on the internet is not captured yet in traditional classrooms.

**MR:** The high schools and lack of engagement of kids at the secondary level is the biggest challenge we face. We have underfunded things which are traditionally associated with high school – ie prom, yearbook. These are basic rights of passage that every kid should have in their schooling experience and if we can't provide them,

we have a problem. Some programs – **Twilight**, staggered scheduled so there are internship programs during the day, small learning communities. Kids say this changes their lives. How can we ramp these programs up and offer them across the city?

**CM:** *Who decided curriculum and how do schools decide?*

**MR:** We, centrally, decide the providers. Some schools have earned autonomy based on their student achievement level, so they use balanced literacy approach. Long term schools with differing level of autonomy will be able to choose, but needs to be some uniformity.

**CM:** *Is there a way for teachers to decide textbooks?*

**CM:** The performance plan doesn't address goals.

**MR:** On the website is the initiative plan and key metrics that sets the goals for the next three years.

**CM:** There should be more emphasis on key transition points and recognize when drop outs occur.

**RJN:** Mental health in middle schools is being addressed with **full service model**. We have added 6-8 mental health supports and the idea is to bring community services together so that we keep kids in school. Building a respect center and wrap programs so that we could figure out how to keep kids in school. 5 to 1 mentor is a full time staff person who works with the kid's family and extended networks. Clinical psych is there for a stand alone service. This program is working in 8 of our middle schools. Results are positive. We would like to roll the program out to high school – at least 5 of them – take this model and have a similar one ready to help access for mental health. One of our main problems in elementary schools special education is inclusion, working with an outside agency. Creating **Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM)** school at Woodson. Classrooms are designed around the content of the class.

**CM:** Worked on **MEP**, we thought it was going to be a community involved plan but initially no teachers were on board. Teachers and staff in schools need to be aware of these plans.

**RJN:** *How would you like to be involved in this process?*

**CM:** Emails are great. Many teachers do not have access to their DCPS emails.

**CM:** It is easy to feel isolated because so many problems during your day-to-day. It would be welcoming and positive to have central office and community meetings with teachers. We have our principal meet with us a lot, but it would be really positive to have someone from central to come out to our school.

**CM:** Representatives at each school should meet with teachers and they take what is discussed back to central administration (ie WTU union rep).

**CM:** We shouldn't feel like we are battling against an anonymous organization, but working together.

**RJN:** Thanked participants and closed meeting.